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The Doctrine of God and of Christ from the Challenge of Gnosticism to Decisions at Chalcedon (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers)

Asbury Theological Seminary [Orlando]
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CH 702 (3 credits)
Fall semester, 2004-2005

The purpose of this course is to enable the student to become familiar with the developing understandings of God and of Jesus Christ in the growing Christian community from the post-apostolic age to the fifth century. As evangelists responded to those to whom they preached the gospel, they were challenged to develop the implications of the apostolic witness as they might be understood by the diverse peoples of Mediterranean world and beyond. Disagreements were integral to the process of developing common understandings. The polemical writings of church leaders, the debates at councils, and the creeds that emerged from those councils provide us with the story of the emergence of the Trinitarian and Christological doctrines that were to guide the church in the centuries to come. Throughout the course students will be encouraged to relate the materials of those early Christian centuries to the issues and problems of today as Christians attempt to understand for themselves and to proclaim to others the God whom they have come to know in Christ Jesus.

The course will be divided into two parts:

Part I: The emergence of the Trinitarian doctrine of God: from the post-apostolic age to the decisions of the Council of Constantinople (381) and Augustine's theological explorations (399 - 419) [September 16 to October 28].

Part II: The related debates concerning the relation of divinity and humanity in the incarnate Jesus Christ through the Council of Chalcedon (451) [November 4 to December 16].

Required texts:

Source readings:

J. Stevenson & W. H. C. Frend, ed., *A New Eusebius: Documents Illustrating the History of the Church to AD 337*, SPCK

J. Stevenson & W. H. C. Frend, ed., *Creeds, Councils and Controversies: Documents illustrating the History of the Church AD 337-461*, SPCK

Histories of Christian thought in the Patristic age:

J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, Continuum International Publishing Group, Incorporated

Stuart G. Hall, *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church*, SPCK, 1991

Other histories of Christian thought in the Patristic age:

Students may wish to employ one or more of these alongside Kelly and Hall; substitutions for assigned sections may be made in consultation with the instructor):

- Justo L. González, *A History of Christian Thought* (revised edition), vol. 1: *From the Beginnings to the Council of Chalcedon*
Historia del Pensamiento Cristiano, t. 1, *Desde los orígenes hasta el Concilio de Calcedonia*
- J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine*
- Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*
vol. 1: *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*
- William L. Placher, *A History of Christian Theology: an Introduction*.
- Hubert Cunliffe-Jones, editor, *A History of Christian Doctrine*

Requirements:

1. Completion of assigned reading for each part of the course in the two required texts by Kelly and Hall (or approved substitutions).
2. Completion of all weekly source readings as assigned for class discussion. Students will be assigned one or several of these selections for which they will be prepared to point out to the class:
 - a) What specific texts do you find in this [these] source reading[s] that illustrate the particular concerns of the author[s] for the church's understanding of God and/or Christ?
 - b) What is the larger context of the within which the author was writing?
3. Participation in discussions at all class sessions.
4. Two 75-minute exams, one after the completion of each part of the course (4 November and 16 December).
5. A paper of 3,000 to 4,000 words describing the contributions of one of the major participants in the development of the doctrines of God and of Christ from the first to the fifth centuries. For preparation of the paper, students will have been expected to read and draw upon at least one major writing of the theologian selected in addition to whatever may have appeared in the assigned source readings. Paper will be due on December 9th.

Grading:

The final grade will be based on presentations and general participation in class discussions (35%), each examination (15%) , and paper (30%).

Part I: The emergence of the Trinitarian doctrine of God

Background reading [chapters in brackets contain materials that only indirectly concern course topics; they are not required reading for the course]:

J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, chapters 1-5, [7-8], 9, and 10.

Stuart G. Hall, *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church*, chapters 1, [2], 3-7, [8-9], 10-11, [12], 13-16, [17-18] and 19, pp. 200-203, [19, pp 191-199 & 203-210], and 22.

Note that the following pages in these assigned chapters contain sections assigned in part II of the course, and, consequently, may be ignored here: pp. 63-64 in chapter 6, p. 73 in chapter 7, pp.107-109 in chapter 11, pp. 154-156 and 159-160 in chapter 14, and pp. 163-164 in chapter 16.

Note that the author provides references to both of the Stevenson/Frend source books (NE & CCC) by page numbers; assigned readings below in these books are listed by item numbers.

Weekly topics and source reading for discussion:

September 16 - Implicit understandings of God in the first 150 years of the Christian community and the challenges of Gnosticism, Montanism, and Marcion

A New Eusebius: #'s 10, 31, 36, 37, 38, 39, 42-80, 83, 84, and 89 [to be read for further discussion on September 23]

September 23 – The theological explorations of Irenæus and Tertullian

A New Eusebius: #'s 93, 96, 98, 102, 138, and 142-147

September 30 - Developing concepts of the God in the third century

A New Eusebius: #'s 110, 111, 121-124, 126, 127, 160, 162-166, 175, 180-182, 225, 226, and 230

October 7 – Arius and the Council of Nicea

A New Eusebius: #'s 280-354

October 14 – Towards Constantinople: the aftermath of Nicea and Athanasius' defense of ὁμοούσιος

A New Eusebius: #'s 301 and 304

Creeds, Councils and Controversies: #'s 1, 4-11, 16-36, 40, 45-47, 63, and 143

October 21 – Towards Constantinople: the Holy Spirit and the contributions of the Cappadocians

Creeds, Councils and Controversies: #'s 64-68, 74(2), 79-86, 90-92, 96-98, 106, 112, 114, and 115

October 28 – The *de Trinitate* of Augustine of Hippo and western tradition

Creeds, Councils and Controversies: # 162

Selections from *de Trinitate* to be assigned

[available at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf103.i.html>]

November 4 (First 75 minutes) - Mid-term exam.

Part II: Divinity and humanity in the incarnate and risen Jesus Christ

Background reading [chapters in brackets contain materials that only indirectly concern course topics; they are not required reading for the course]:

J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, chapters 6, 11-12, [and 13-18].

Stuart G. Hall, *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church*:

pp. 63-64 in chapter 6, p. 73 in chapter 7, pp.107-109 in chapter 11, pp. 154-156 and 159-160 in chapter 14, and pp. 163-164 in chapter 16, and chapters 20 -22.

Note that the author provides references to both of the Stevenson/Frend source books (NE & CCC) by page numbers; assigned readings below in these books are listed by item numbers.

Weekly topics and source reading for discussion:

November 4 (Final 75 minutes) – The first three centuries

A New Eusebius: #'s 12, 27, 229

November 11 – Apollinarianism and the Council of Constantinople

Creeds, Councils and Controversies: #'s 68-74(1), 87, 93,

November 18 – Cyril, Nestorius and the Council of Ephesus

Creeds, Councils and Controversies: #'s 215-225

December 2 – The Formula of Reunion, Monophysitism, and the Council of Chalcedon

Creeds, Councils and Controversies: #'s 226-228, 237-246, 249, 250, 252

December 9 – The legacy of Chalcedon and a glance at the second and third councils of Constantinople

Creeds, Councils and Controversies: # 229

Readings to be made available from Hardy, *Christology of the Later Fathers*, pp. 375-385 and Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church* (pp. 89-91).

December 16 - First 75 minutes: Final exam.